

The Saga of Joseph: The Blessing Genesis 47:1-31.

How do unbelievers around you view the Church?

Some despise the Church as a promoter of outdated and dangerous ideas.

Many see her as largely irrelevant, a distraction from the more important issues of life.

If we are not careful, our opinion of the Church will be more influenced by the world around us than by the Word of God.

The Church is made up of all those who profess faith in Jesus Christ and their children. The outward sign of belonging to Jesus Christ is baptism into His name.

What we call the “institutional Church” is the gathering of these believers into a body for worship and fellowship and discipleship and evangelism and service.

This gathering of God’s people together into a cohesive unit is very much like what God did with Jacob’s children as they grew into one nation while they were living in Egypt.

OT Israel and NT Church are two branches joined to the same root, which is Jesus Christ. Jesus is the perfect king of Israel’s dreams, the Promised Messiah. Jesus is the perfect king, ruling from heaven over His Church.

The point is this: Throughout all of history, Jesus has been building a people for Himself. The Church, both Old and New Testament, is the Bride of Jesus Christ.

Do you think Jesus’ opinion of the Church is in conflict with that of the world?

Does Jesus view the Church as outdated and dangerous?

Does He think of her as irrelevant?

Love does not make Jesus blind to the realities of the imperfections of the Church.

He is constantly working by His Word and Spirit to purify His people.

But His covenant love keeps Him fixed upon the Church relative to every other institution in this world.

And how those outside the Church treat those in the Church is taken personally by Jesus. If you want to get on the bad side of Jesus, treat the Church poorly. If you want to get on the good side of Jesus, treat the Church kindly.

The Church is that Apple of Jesus’ eye.

That is the simple truth worked out in Genesis 47.

Genesis 47 is the outworking of one specific promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12.

I will bless those who bless you,

The complete promise is:

I will bless
 those who bless you,
 and
 him who dishonors you
I will curse,

God might have said to Abraham, "I am blessing you because you are believing in me. And all who believe in Me will also be blessed."

This is true theologically.

But instead, he tells Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you..."

God is building a people on the earth. And God wants people to treat His people well.

And so, He gives this promise.

As an individual, belonging to the Church, it is hard to accept this truth.

It would have been just as difficult for Jacob to accept in his time.

The family of Jacob is a small band of 70 people, hardly more than a blip on landscape of history.

Egypt is a country you can read about in your history books.

But Israel at this time, you will not find.

By every human standard, Israel needs the blessing of Egypt. But no one would ever think that Egypt would need the blessing of Israel.

And it is almost unthinkable to believe that Egypt's destiny depends upon how she treats little Israel. But this is precisely the point of the story.

Pharaoh shows the offspring of Abraham blessing?

Pharaoh consequently receives great blessing!

Another Pharaoh will be harsh and cruel to Israel?

God will bring 10 horrible plagues upon Egypt for that Pharaoh's cruelty.

In Genesis 47, God is establishing the theological truth of His promise: I will bless those who bless you.

The story picks up after the reunion of Joseph with his family. Now, Joseph will present his family to Pharaoh.

Read Genesis 47:1-4.

So Joseph
went in
and
told Pharaoh,
"My father
and
my brothers,
with their flocks and herds
and
all that they possess,
have come from the land of Canaan.
They are now in the land of Goshen."
2 And
from among his brothers
he took five men
and
presented them to Pharaoh.
3 Pharaoh said to his brothers,
"What is your occupation?"
And
they said to Pharaoh,
"Your servants are shepherds,
as our fathers were."
4 They said to Pharaoh,
"We have come to sojourn in the land,
for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks,
for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan.
And now,
please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen."

Even though earlier Pharaoh had commanded Joseph to bring his family down to Egypt, there is still some uncertainty if Pharaoh will be okay with Israel dwelling in the land of Goshen.

Pharaohs can change their minds. And now that Joseph's brothers are standing in front of him, he may not like their looks, or their occupation as shepherds.

Does Joseph only present five of his brothers so as to not make his family look too large? And which five did Joseph choose? The best and strongest or the lesser brothers?

We are not told how he picked these five, or why.

But as they are standing before Pharaoh, they had to feel small. And they had to know that their welfare, humanly speaking, rested in whether this ruler would choose to bless them.

Read Genesis 47:5-6.

5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph,
 "Your father and your brothers have come to you.
6 The land of Egypt is before you.
 Settle your father and your brothers
 in the best of the land.
 Let them settle in the land of Goshen,
 and
 if you know any able men among them,
 put them in charge of my livestock."

Pharaoh could not have been more kind or generous!

He is faithful to his early promise to allow Joseph's family to live in the best land of his country.

And what is more, Pharaoh wants some of Joseph's family to work as shepherds of Egypt's own flocks.

The fact that Egyptians despised shepherds did not mean that had no flocks of their own. They had large flocks. And flocks need shepherds to care for them.

Egyptians just viewed shepherds as the lowest rung in their society.

So, given the fact that the family occupation was shepherding, Pharaoh offers the best deal he could possibly give.

Pharaoh has blessed Jacob's family. And in so doing, he has fulfilled the criteria of God's promise in Genesis 12:3.

It remains to be seen if God will be faithful to pour out blessing upon Pharaoh.

And how is it possible for Pharaoh to be more blessed than he already is?

He is already the ruler of one of the most powerful nations in the world.

We shall see.

Read Genesis 47:7-10.

7 Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father
 and
 stood him before Pharaoh,
 and
 Jacob blessed Pharaoh.
8 And
 Pharaoh said to Jacob,
 "How many are the days of the years of your life?"
9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh,
 "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years.
 Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life,
 and
 they have not attained to the days of the years of the life
 of my fathers in the days of their sojourning."
10 And
 Jacob blessed Pharaoh
 and
 went out from the presence of Pharaoh.

It is somewhat odd that Joseph presents his father to Pharaoh after presenting his brothers.

Why not present them together?

Or why not present Jacob first?

Maybe there were issues of social or political etiquette.

But more than etiquette, we are watching God make a theological point to His people.

The question of these verses becomes, "who blesses who?"

The normal direction of blessing is for the greater to bless the lesser.

In the previous scene with the brothers, it is obvious that the brothers are the lesser and Pharaoh is the greater.

Therefore, in the scene with the brothers, it is Pharaoh who blesses Jacob's family.

But now it is Jacob himself standing before Pharaoh. And Jacob is the current head of God's people. Therefore, Jacob has the privilege and authority to extend blessing.

In terms of their present power and wealth Pharaoh is far greater than Jacob. But in terms of God's promise to Abraham, Jacob is far greater than Pharaoh.

And so, who gives the blessing in this meeting?
Jacob.

Twice we are told that Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

The wording is very subtle.

If you were in the room, you might not even have noticed anything special going on. It is entirely possible to see Jacob as only giving a polite greeting at the beginning and end of their meeting.

But anyone who has been reading the book of Genesis understands the theological importance of "blessing".

It is probably true that Jacob could not engage in any formal ceremony of blessing with Pharaoh.

That would have been viewed as presumptuous and arrogant.

But as readers, we can easily see the connection.

Jacob is pronouncing blessing upon Pharaoh.

And he does this while downplaying his personal greatness.

When asked of his age, Jacob tells Pharaoh that his years have been few and full of evil.

If you were looking for someone to bless you, you would not choose Jacob.

From Pharaoh's perspective, it would be like choosing to look for blessing from a homeless person on the street. Jacob does not try to impress Pharaoh with his personal greatness.

But in terms of "the Blessing", Jacob is greater than Pharaoh.

Immediately after this, Jacob "blessed Pharaoh" a second time.

As far as we know, this is the last contact that Jacob has with Pharaoh.

What is clear from the record is that this Pharaoh treated God's people with kindness and generosity.

He was a blessing to Israel and his sons.

And in Jacob's meeting he seems to make a point to pronounce blessing upon Pharaoh.

What will become of these meetings?

Read Genesis 47:11-12.

11 Then Joseph
settled his father and his brothers
and
gave them a possession in the land of Egypt,
in the best of the land,
in the land of Rameses,
as Pharaoh had commanded.

12 And
Joseph provided
his father,
his brothers,
and
all his father's household with food,
according to the number of their dependents.

Israel's covenant keeping God, through Pharaoh and Joseph, provides for his people to live and flourish in a foreign land as sojourners.

By Pharaoh's command, they were given land, the best land in all of Egypt.

And by Joseph's command, they were given provisions of food.

There is no mention of Israel or his sons having to pay for this food.

Israel and all his dependents were taken care of by Joseph.

In this way, God has blessed His people. God is being faithful to His promise to "bless Abraham".

The blessing of Israel is contrasted with what happens to the rest of people of Egypt and Canaan.

This contrast is easy to see.

It is easy to miss the tremendous blessing that Pharaoh receives in the midst of this great famine.

And if we miss this, we will not make the connection to the promise of God's promise to Abraham.

"I will bless those who bless you."

Read Genesis 47:13.

13

Now
there was no food in all the land,
for the famine was very severe,
so that the land of Egypt
and
the land of Canaan
languished
by reason of the famine.

It is likely that the famine may even have affected other nations. But we are concerned with Egypt and Canaan.

Both in the land from which Israel came, and in the land in which they are residing, there is a tremendous famine.

People are languishing everywhere. Except for the Israelites.
And, as we will see, except for Pharaoh.

Read Genesis 47:14.

14

And
Joseph gathered up all the money
that was found
in the land of Egypt
and
in the land of Canaan,
in exchange for the grain that they bought.
And
Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house.

Stage One: Pharaoh goes from being wealthy to “stinking rich.”

There is a way to read this passage wondering if it was even ethical for Pharaoh to make people pay for food. After all, the only way that Pharaoh has food is that for 7 years he has been taking 20% of the produce of his people. He does this by way of a tax. He did not buy the food from the people. Now, he is selling their own grain back to them.

But I do not think that this is the way that we are to look at the text.

In the end, the people are not complaining. They are proclaiming Joseph to be their savior.

It is better to see the text as proclaiming God's faithfulness to his promise, even in the midst of one of the worst famines ever known.

Pharaoh blesses Israel.
God blesses Pharaoh, even in a famine.

But the blessing of wealth is only the beginning.

Read Genesis 47:15-17.

15 And
 when the money was all spent
 in the land of Egypt
 and
 in the land of Canaan,
 all the Egyptians came to Joseph
 and
 said,
 "Give us food.
 Why should we die before your eyes?
 For our money is gone."

16 And
 Joseph answered,
 "Give your livestock,
 and
 I will give you food
 in exchange for your livestock,
 if your money is gone."

17 So
 they brought their livestock to Joseph,
 and
 Joseph gave them food
 in exchange
 for the horses,
 the flocks,
 the herds,
 and
 the donkeys.
 He supplied them with food

that we may live and not die,
and
that the land may not be desolate."

20

So
Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh,
for all the Egyptians sold their fields,
because the famine was severe on them.
The land became Pharaoh's.

Stage Three: Pharaoh's blessing now includes all the land and all the people. They are all his servants.

We can only assume that this does not include the Israelites.

We are not told of their slavery until the book of Exodus, much later.

Again, we wonder if it is right for Pharaoh to own all the land and all the people. But this is not the point. It may not be the ideal. But the passage is not trying to instruct us on the merits of Government owned lands or voluntary slavery to pay off debts. Later on, God will give different rules for His people when they come into their own land.

Permanent slavery will not be allowed among God's people.

And land that is lost due to debts must be returned during the Year of Jubilee.

But none of this is the point. The point is that Pharaoh is receiving unfathomable blessing. And this is occurring during a terrible famine. And it is coming to him through the hand of Joseph.

When unbelievers treat God's people with kindness and generosity, God rewards them with great blessing.

Read Genesis 47:21-22.

21

As for the people,
he made servants of them
from one end of Egypt to the other.

22

Only the land of the priests he did not buy,
for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh
and
lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them;
therefore
they did not sell their land.

These verses anticipate a future standoff between the priests of Egypt and Moses.

We are told here that these priests are not made the slaves of Pharaoh.
These priests represent the gods of Egypt.
Pharaoh is not embracing the God of Israel.
The great conflict between Yahweh and these gods will have to wait until Moses' day.
For now, we are simply told that they are not made slaves of Pharaoh.

Read Genesis 47:23-24.

23 Then Joseph said to the people,
 "Behold,
 I have this day bought
 you
 and
 your land
 for Pharaoh.
 Now
 here is seed for you,
 and
 you shall sow the land.
24 And
 at the harvests
 you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh,
 and
 four fifths shall be your own,
 as seed for the field
 and
 as food for yourselves
 and your households,
 and as food for your little ones."

Stage four: Pharaoh's blessing includes the future.

The ongoing tax code that Joseph sets up would not have been considered oppressive. Joseph gives seed to the people so that they can continue to sow the ground, hoping for a harvest.

In order to give them seed, Joseph demands 20% of their harvest.

We know from other texts of this time that it was typical to demand as much as 33% tax. But oppressive or not, Joseph has now provided for the ongoing wealth of Pharaoh.

There is not much more that Pharaoh could have. Except maybe one thing.

Read Genesis 47:25.

25 And
 they said,
 "You have saved our lives;
 may it please my lord,
 we will be servants to Pharaoh."

Stage five:

Pharaoh is given the gift of a people that are happy. You might think after being brought into slavery they would rise up in rebellion.

Instead, they are grateful and willingly bow themselves to Pharaoh.

Read Genesis 47:26-27.

26 So
 Joseph made it a statute
 concerning the land of Egypt,
 and
 it stands to this day,
 that Pharaoh should have the fifth;
 the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.
27 Thus Israel settled
 in the land of Egypt,
 in the land of Goshen.
 And
 they gained possessions in it,
 and
 were fruitful
 and
 multiplied greatly.

Once again, we return to the blessing given to God's people. They have become fruitful and multiplied. These are the words used in Genesis 1 given to Adam and Eve.

While Egyptians are suffering and losing their land and possessions, God's people are flourishing.

Now we come to the climax of the story: Jacob's response to receiving blessing from Pharaoh.

Read Genesis 47:28-31.

28 And
 Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years.
 So
 the days of Jacob,
 the years of his life,
 were 147 years.

29 And
 when the time drew near
 that Israel must die,
 he called his son Joseph
 and
 said to him,
 "If now I have found favor in your sight,
 put your hand under my thigh
 and
 promise to deal kindly and truly with me.
 Do not bury me in Egypt,
30 but
 let me lie with my fathers.
 Carry me out of Egypt
 and
 bury me in their burying place."
 He answered,
 "I will do as you have said."

31 And
 he said,
 "Swear to me";
 and
 he swore to him.
 Then Israel bowed himself
 upon the head of his bed.

If you had received so much blessing from the hand of Pharaoh, would you not be tempted to see Pharaoh as the one in whom to place your trust? Pharaoh owns everything – even the land of Canaan. But when it comes time for Jacob to die, Jacob makes Joseph swear an oath that he will return his body to the land of Canaan.

Jacob's hope is not in the wealth or riches of the land in which he is sojourning. He has his eyes firmly fixed upon the Promised Blessing.

Jacob demands that Joseph take an oath to bury him in the land of Egypt.
This action is symbolic. Jacob is making a theological point. Jacob's receiving the blessing does not depend upon him being buried in Egypt.
None of Joseph's brothers are buried in Egypt.
He wants his offspring to know precisely where his hopes lay.

Jacob is not satisfied until Joseph swears the oath.

The final sentence is difficult to understand.

Then Israel bowed himself
upon the head of his bed.

Either Jacob is fulfilling the prophecy that he would bow before Joseph. Or Jacob is bowing in worship on his bed.

It is probably best taken as Jacob bowing in worship.

How do we apply the theological principles in our own time and situation?

1. God will bless those who bless Jesus Christ.

All of the promises of blessing depend upon our faith in Jesus Christ.
The blessing of Abraham is the blessing that Jesus has won in his life, death and resurrection.

Therefore, the first way to apply this promise of blessing is this:

God will bless those who bless Jesus Christ.

If you have never placed all your hopes in Jesus Christ, there is no decision more important for you to make.

John 3:17-18 ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

2. God will bless those who bless the Church, Jesus' Bride on earth.

When Saul persecuted the Church, Jesus asked him, "Why do you persecute me?"

God takes it very personal when people either bless or curse his people.

I know that we often do not see this blessing or cursing of God worked out in this life. Saints all over the world experience oppression and persecution at the hands of unbelievers.

But whether in this life or in the Judgment, God will fulfill His promise to Abraham to bless those who bless him and those who curse him, God will curse.

Christians are to live under the knowledge that, in Christ, we are the Apple of God's eye. People treat us poorly to their own peril.

3. We must continue to keep our eyes fixed upon our eternal blessing.

Jacob had been given many earthly blessings. But he did not set his heart upon them. He remained fixed upon the eternal promises.

Each of us have experienced God's bountiful provision throughout our lives. Many of those have come to us because of our earthly families, or from a favorable employer, or from the nation in which we live.

Do not become enamored by these temporal blessings.
God is the only source of eternal blessing.

Value the fact that you belong to the Church, His eternal Bride!